

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Original) An apparatus for cleaning small items such as jewelry using a jet of steam, said device comprising:

a steam generator disposed within a housing means, said steam generator having a sealable canister for holding a heated water and steam mixture under pressure;

heating means to heat said sealable canister;

a manually operated valve which is attached to said sealable canister, wherein said manually operated valve provides selective communication of said steam from said sealable canister to;

a steam tube which is attached to said manually operated valve for communicating said steam to the terminating end of said steam tube, said terminating end is adapted to emit said jet of steam to the ambient environment, whereby the space defined by said jet of steam defines a cleaning zone whereby small items such as jewelry may be cleaned by immersion therein; and,

a catch basket which is disposed on said housing means, said catch basket having a screen member which is disposed underneath said terminating end of said steam tube and oriented to laterally traverse said jet of steam to trap small gems which may inadvertently become dislodged by said jet of steam during the cleaning operation while simultaneously allowing said jet of steam to pass freely therethrough.

2. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said heating means is automatically controlled by a thermostat, said thermostat is mounted to said sealable canister wherein

said thermostat controls the pressure of said water and steam mixture within said sealable canister.

3. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said manually operated valve is manually operable by a valve actuator button means disposed on said housing means, thereby obviating the need for remotely positioned manually operated valves requiring cumbersome cabling structures.
4. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said steam tube is made of a thermoplastic material.
5. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said steam tube is rigid in shape, said terminating end of said steam tube is oriented vertically such that said jet of steam is adapted to be projected generally downward in direction.
6. (Original) The apparatus of claim 5, wherein said housing means comprises a front sidewall, said front sidewall having an aperture for receipt of said steam tube therethrough, said front sidewall being concave in shape in order to conform to the lateral space defined by said cleaning zone and to minimize the lateral distance which said steam tube projects beyond said front sidewall.
7. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said sealable canister further comprises a pressure safety valve means for automatically releasing said steam in said sealable canister to ambient environment if the pressure in said sealable canister exceeds a predetermined level.
8. (Original) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said predetermined level of pressure in sealable canister is less than 15 psi.

9. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said sealable canister has a maximum water holding capacity of up to 16 ounces of fluid.
10. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said catch basket further comprises slidable insertion means for removable attachment to said housing means.
11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said housing means further comprises tong holding means for the efficient and easily accessible storage of conventional tongs.
12. (Original) A method for cleaning small items such as jewelry using a jet of steam, said steps comprising:
 - providing a steam generator having a sealable canister for holding a heated water and steam mixture under pressure, heating means to heat said sealable canister, a manually operated valve which is attached to said sealable canister, wherein said manually operated valve provides selective communication of said steam from said sealable canister to a steam tube which is attached to said manually operated valve for communicating said steam to the terminating end of said steam tube, said terminating end is adapted to emit said jet of steam to the ambient environment, whereby the space defined by said jet of steam defines a cleaning zone;
 - connecting said heating means to a suitable source of electrical power;
 - actuating said manually operated valve thereby causing a jet of steam to be emitted from said terminating end of said steam tube; and,
 - immersing said small item to be cleaned in said cleaning zone.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said steam generator is disposed in a housing means, said housing means having a catch basket disposed thereon, said catch basket having a screen member which is disposed underneath said terminating end of said steam tube and oriented to laterally traverse said jet of steam to trap small gems which may inadvertently become dislodged by said jet of steam during the cleaning operation while simultaneously allowing said jet of steam to pass freely therethrough.
14. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said heating means is automatically controlled by a thermostat, said thermostat is mounted to said sealable canister wherein said thermostat controls the pressure of said water and steam mixture within said sealable canister.
15. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said manually operated valve is manually operable by a valve actuator button means disposed on said housing means, thereby obviating the need for remotely positioned manually operated valves requiring cumbersome cabling structures.
16. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said steam tube is made of a thermoplastic material.
17. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said steam tube is rigid in shape, said terminating end of said steam tube is oriented vertically such that said jet of steam is adapted to be projected generally downward in direction.
18. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein said steam generator is disposed in a housing means, said housing means comprises a front sidewall, said front sidewall having an aperture for receipt of said steam tube therethrough, said front sidewall being concave in shape in order to conform to the lateral space defined by said cleaning zone

and to minimize the lateral distance which said steam tube projects beyond said front sidewall.

19. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said sealable canister further comprises a pressure safety valve means for automatically releasing said steam in said sealable canister to ambient environment if the pressure in said sealable canister exceeds a predetermined level.

20. (Original) The method of claim 19, wherein said predetermined level of pressure in sealable canister is less than 15 psi.

21. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said sealable canister has a maximum water holding capacity of up to 16 ounces of fluid.

22. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein said catch basket further comprises slidable insertion means for removable attachment to said housing means.

23. (Original) An apparatus for cleaning small items such as jewelry using a jet of steam, said device comprising:

a steam generator disposed within a housing means, said steam generator having a sealable canister for holding a heated water and steam mixture under pressure; heating means to heat said sealable canister;

a manually operated valve means which provides selective communication of said steam from said sealable canister to;

a steam tube which is attached to said manually operated valve means for communicating said steam to the terminating end of said steam tube, said terminating end is adapted to emit said jet of steam to the ambient environment, whereby the space defined by said jet of steam defines a cleaning

zone whereby small items such as jewelry may cleaned by immersion therein;
and,

a catch basket means which is disposed on said housing means to trap small gems which may inadvertently become dislodged by said jet of steam during the cleaning operation while simultaneously allowing said jet of steam to pass freely therethrough.

35 U.S.C. §103(a), Baldacci in view of Gross

The Examiner rejected claims 1-3, 5, 7-9, 12-15, 17, 19-21, and 23 as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent 5,017,759 to Baldacci. in view of U.S. Patent 4,941,490 to Gross. However, there was nothing in the Baldacci or Gross disclosures which suggested any motivation to combine the two aforementioned references. Whereas Baldacci only describes a utility which is pertinent to the foaming of beverages, Applicant describes a utility, which is afforded via the implementation of a catch basket, that is totally separate and distinct therefrom. Furthermore a structure such as the cleaner described by Gross is relatively large and cumbersome, requiring a complicated temperature control mechanism and an external supply of pressurized air, a design that totally neglects the Applicant's inventive concept of an inexpensive, compact, and easy to use jewelry cleaning device. Applicant will note that it is imperative that hindsight not be used in formulating a determination of obviousness, wherein one aspect that is indicative of the usage of hindsight is treating the mere differences of the claimed invention to the prior art, rather than assessing the invention as a whole. The inclusion of a catch basket into the device as described by Baldacci yields a nonanalogous utility which was not taught or even remotely suggested by Baldacci.

With regard to the cited and claimed pressure limits, appropriate domestic regulatory agencies cite specific design constraints for relatively large steam generation vessels. These required design constraints inherently increase the manufacturing costs of the cleaning device, a problem that Applicant's design does NOT have. A pertinent requirement regarding steam generating vessels is cited in United Listings (UL) 834,1.5 states, wherein a specific upper pressure limit of 15 PSI may be utilized by a steam

generating device without requiring these costly design constraints. None of the teachings of the prior art, or any device known to Applicant shows any knowledge of this cost saving and safety conscious enhancement to a jewelry steam cleaner. Thus, Applicant contends that there is a distinct and nonobvious enhancement that has been provided by the jewelry cleaning device that has a capacity of less than 16 PSI.

35 U.S.C. §103(a), Baldacci in view of Gross and in further view of Goicoechea

The Examiner rejected claims 4, and 16 as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent 5,017,759 to Baldacci in view of U.S. Patent 4,941,490 to Gross and in further view of U.S. Patent 3,757,082 to Goicoechea. However, Baldacci or Goicoechea only discloses a tube that is adequate for use with consumable foodstuffs or medical respiratory devices respectively, and thus shows no intellectual possession of a tube made of any other type of material. Whereas if either device of Baldacci or Goicoechea could be implemented with a tube made of plastic material, the type of plastic material used would have to be approved for use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), wherein it is well known in the plastics art that numerous types of low grade plastic materials are not suitable for use with human consumable foodstuffs, a problem that the device of Applicant does not have.

Furthermore, the tube of Goicoechea, as described in column 5, lines 24-30, has enabled the use of plastic material via regulating the internal temperature of the water supply well below the Glass Transition Temperature of most common plastics, as described in column 5, lines 26-43. Applicant's tube on the other hand, has enabled the use of plastic by limiting the capacity of the water tank, thereby inherently reducing the

effective duty cycle of the device in order to alleviate known problems of relatively high temperature fluids in plastic tubes. Thus Applicant's plastic tube, in addition to possessing an entirely nonanalogous utility from Goicoechea or Baldacci, enables the use of a tube formed of plastic using an entirely different mode of operation. Moreover, the plastic tube of Applicant serves to abate skin burns via inadvertent contact by a user thereto, a property that was not taught nor suggested by Baldacci or Goicoechea.

Due to the aforementioned reasons cited hereinabove *supra*, and because claims 4, and 16 are dependent upon claims 1, and 12 respectively, in conjunction with Applicant's contention that claims 1, and 12 cite novel and unobvious subject matter, Applicant respectfully submits the claims 4, and 16 are not obvious to Baldacci in view of Goicoechea and requests that this rejection be withdrawn.

35 U.S.C. §103(a), Baldacci in view of Gross and in further view of Kain or Shioda

The Examiner rejected claims 10, and 22 as being unpatentable over Baldacci in view of Gross and in further view of U.S. Patent 6,550,862 to Kain, or U.S. Patent 4,792,174 to Shioda. However, neither Kain nor Shioda teach or suggest a slidable device that is selectively removable from its respective receptacle. Nevertheless, the enhanced utility afforded by the removable catch basket as described by Applicant is to enable the compact storage of the jewelry cleaning device as well as to enable the cleaning of larger objects that are not easily placed within the cleaning zone. More specifically, the removable nature of the catch basket further promotes the ability to implement a housing having a relatively smaller size than conventionally known jewelry cleaners by enabling placement of the catch basket relatively close to the terminating end of the discharge tube when used to

clean smaller jewelry items, yet removable in order to allow the cleaning of larger items that would not otherwise fit within the relatively small cleaning zone of Applicant's device. Thus Applicant believes that neither Kain nor Shioda could have possibly taught or suggested the aforescribed utility due to the lack of selective removability thereof.

Regarding the Examiner's contention that both the Kain and Shioda devices are removable, Applicant will point to column 1, lines 30-33 of Kain, and column 2, lines 64-68 of Shioda which explicitly state that the slidable devices are not selectively removable from their respective receptacles.

Given these facts, in addition to the fact that claims 10, and 22 are dependent upon claims 1, and 12, which Applicant believes to be patentable subject matter, Applicant respectfully submits the claims 10, and 22 are not obvious to Baldacci in view of Gross and in further view of Kain or Shioda requests that this rejection be withdrawn.

35 U.S.C. §103(a), Baldacci in view of Gross and in further view of Romeo et al.

The Examiner rejected claim 11 as being unpatentable over Baldacci in view of Gross and in further view of U.S. Patent 4,761,850 to Romeo, et al. However, claim 11 is dependent upon claim 1, which Applicant believes to cite novel and unobvious subject matter. Thus, Applicant respectfully submits that claim 11 is not obvious to Baldacci in view of Gross and in further view of Romeo, et al. and requests that this rejection be withdrawn.

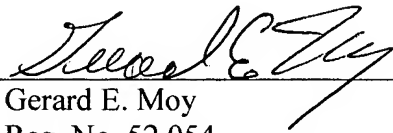
Allowable Subject Matter

Applicant gratefully acknowledges the acceptance of claim 6, and 18 as allowable subject matter if rewritten in independent form. However, Applicant believes that parent claims 1, and 12 are patentable as described hereinabove, and thus Applicant feels that the rewriting of claims 6, and 18 independent form is not necessary.

Prompt and favorable action on the merits of the claims is earnestly solicited. If any minor issues remain, please contact Applicant at (972) 801-9843.

Respectfully submitted,

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By: 
Gerard E. Moy
Reg. No. 52,054

1608 Danube Lane
Plano, Texas 75075
(972) 801-9843